

America's Cup pours tourist gold on West Australia

By Dick Alexander

San Francisco Examiner

Perth, Australia
It's been just three years since Australia captured the world's most treasured sailing trophy from the United States. And Australia — especially Western Australia — isn't about to let the world forget it. For instance:

■ When your Trans Australia jet lands at Perth's international airport, the flight attendant announces over the intercom: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Perth, home of the America's Cup."

■ On your way to your hotel, you notice a myriad of automobile tags proclaiming Western Australia as "Home of America's Cup."

■ You turn on the TV at the Sheraton Perth and the set automatically flips to Channel 1, where you get a 25-minute pitch on the attractions of Perth, the "overwhelming hospitality of Western Australia" and something you already know:

The America's Cup, a 33½-inch-tall silver trophy won by a ship named America in 1851 and successfully defended by the Yanks for 132 years until Sept. 26, 1983, reposes proudly in a locked plexiglass case at the Royal Perth Yacht Club.

All this hype and hoopla, of course, is a prelude to the main event: Australia's defense of the cup, a best-of-seven 12-meter-yacht race beginning Jan. 31. The elimination series began in October with six countries challenging.

The races are being held off the coast of Fremantle, a quaint, colonial town just 15 minutes by car from downtown Perth.

The beneficiaries of these races include:

■ Western Australia, whose economy, according to a University of Western Australia study, should grow by more than 700 million Australian dollars — about \$497 million U.S. (Tourism officials put the growth much higher.)

■ Fremantle, which already has had a transfusion of \$30 million (Australian) to spruce up its image (about \$21.3 million U.S.).

Perth is a city of some 900,000 residents in the southwest corner of Australia on the Indian Ocean. Located on rolling land on the Swan River estuary, it is said to be the sunniest capital in Australia, receiving a yearly average of eight hours of sunshine per day.

Kings Park, a flowered bush area on a hill within the city, overlooks Perth's architectural pattern of 19th-century buildings set against modern high rises.

Although the showdown sea battle is still weeks away, Perth already is gripped with America's Cup fever.

The cup, according to the university study, is expected to draw more than 1.25 million visitors from October through February. It is estimated that more than 800,000 of the visitors will be Australians.

The tourism commission says there will be no shortage of accommoda-

tions during the October-February racing period. More than six major hotels have opened in Perth during the past two years, according to a Pacific Travel News report, and four more are expected to open in time for the race.

Warren Pateman, general manager for the Western Australian Tourism Commission's America's Cup unit, said that by Christmas, Perth expected to have more international hotel rooms than Sydney in New South Wales, which is a much larger city. "We've got the fastest growing tourism development in Australia," he said.

Besides trailer parks, luxury tents, small apartments and motor homes that will be available, a large pool of homes is prepared to open doors to visitors.

"And we have 15 passenger liners coming to Fremantle, which will anchor in the port and act as floating hotels for the duration of the America's Cup," Pateman said.

The 15 will bring some 15,000 additional visitors to Fremantle. One of these is the Mediterranean Sky, which is actually being run by the Holiday Inns organization and will be known as the 'America's Cup Holiday Inn.'

CUP Continued on page 11E

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